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RWANDA

SUCCESS STORY

Ecotourism and handicrafts hand-in-hand

USAID-funded small grants help artisans discover new skills and generate income



Photo Credit: Daniel Lapidus

“This project is an opportunity for me to develop skills and find alternatives to exploiting the resources of the park.”

- *Annonciata Mukambaraga, Treasurer of a handicrafts cooperative for marginalized youth*

Nobody in their village was aware of Fabien Dusenge’s talent as an artist or Annonciata Mukambaraga’s leadership and entrepreneurship skills until they became part of *Association Pour la Promotion des Initiative au Rwanda* (APIR) handicraft development initiative, made possible by a Small Grant from USAID under the *Destination NYUNGWE* Project (DNP). DNP, implemented by International Resources Group, promotes profitable ecotourism through improved biodiversity conservation in Rwanda. The grant allows APIR to hire professional trainers to impart specialized knowledge and skills to 47 youth who are part of the Association.

Fabien is quickly emerging as one of the best woodworking specialists in his village. In December 2008, he had no experience with woodworking and by April 2009 he was able to sculpt lifelike wooden sculptures with intricate detail in just a few days. He is perfecting his skills so that he can earn enough income and does not have to return to his previous low-paid seasonal job as a porter in a tea factory.

Annonciata Mukambaraga, who discovered the project through the local church, is the Treasurer of the newly-founded cooperative that is helping marginalized youth develop skills and earn income from handicrafts. She herself is disabled and lost all of her siblings in the Rwandan genocide in 1994. She used to join hunting teams in the park, but has since been educated about the value of the biodiversity and economic benefits that sustainable tourism can bring. “This project is an opportunity for me to develop skills and find alternatives to exploiting the resources of the park,” says Annonciata.

Both artisans look forward to selling their unique “forest themed” wares to tourists from around the world, whose number is expected to increase after the completion of a canopy walkway, currently under construction with support from USAID. The 200-meter walkway is anticipated to provide a spectacular viewing opportunity at the level of the forest canopy, with views to the west of a long forested valley and below and to the east of a stream bed and forest of tropical trees and ferns.